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C O N F I D E N T I A L PRISTINA 000412

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DEPT FOR DRL, INL, EUR/SCE  
NSC FOR HOVENIER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/24/2019

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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: RUSSIAN AND SLOVAK REPS PRESS OSCE ON  
LEGITIMACY OF ELECTIONS ASSISTANCE

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher W. Dell for Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

11. (U) Heads of Mission from the Russian and Slovak Liaison Offices in Kosovo offered pointed questions to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Mission in Kosovo (OMIK) regarding activities related to upcoming municipal elections during a September 24 meeting reviewing OMIK's recent activities. Russian Head of Mission Andrey Shugorov interrupted a presentation on OMIK assistance to Kosovo's Central Elections Commission (CEC) to clarify that OMIK is restricting its activities to advising and training as opposed to any executive functions that might assist the CEC in implementing elections preparations. OMIK affirmed that this is the case, only to face a series of aggressive questions from Slovak Head of Mission Miloslav Nad, who pointedly tried to get OMIK to admit that its engagement was "crucial" to the CEC's preparations and wanted to know whether or not the GOK had requested OMIK assistance on elections. OMIK dodged the question as to whether or not the CEC is dependent on its assistance for organizing the November 15 elections but confirmed that President Sejdiu had requested OMIK's mentorship at the CEC. In our intervention at the end of the meeting, we thanked OMIK for its presentation and reframed the discussion on elections by arguing that OMIK's assistance to the CEC is crucial to OMIK's mandate in Kosovo to develop capacity in Kosovo's democratic institutions, adding that this is exactly the type of activity that we want OMIK to pursue. France, Germany, and Italy failed to attend the meeting, and the junior representative from the United Kingdom remained silent, leaving us as the only Quint voice to express support for OMIK's elections programming.

12. (C) Following the meeting OMIK thanked us for our comments and told us that this was the first time that the Slovak representative had attended one of these review sessions, and the Russian head of mission rarely attends. OMIK, also, tells us that it is sensing increased activity and pressure from both Russia and Serbia regarding program activities. During a recent visit from OSCE's Vienna-based Advisory Committee on Management and Finance (ACMF), Russian and Serbian representatives also challenged OMIK's engagement with the CEC on elections and wanted confirmation that OMIK has no involvement in Kosovo's decentralization plans, saying that this would be unacceptable due to decentralization's connection to the Ahtisaari plan. We also hear that OMIK is

receiving continuing pressure from Serbia's delegation in Vienna to implement a plan to construct, implement, and run a series of residential social welfare centers for Serbs in Kosovo, a plan that OMIK tells us is far beyond its mandate and budget.

13. (C) COMMENT: We have long been concerned that OMIK's assistance to the CEC might fall prey to attacks from non-recognizers of Kosovo's independence on OSCE's permanent council like Russia, Serbia, and Slovakia. OMIK is operating on strict orders from Vienna that it cannot run elections as it did in previous years and formally restricts its activities to advising and capacity building. At the same time, we must recognize that OMIK's assistance is, indeed, "crucial." OMIK has dozens of staff embedded at the CEC and plans to increase its staffing to approximately 80 personnel.

These same personnel, however, will stop their activities--on Vienna's orders--on the eve of elections. The CEC is counting on OMIK's assistance up until November 15--the date of elections--and losing it ahead of that time will have an adverse impact on Kosovo's ability to prepare for its first post-independence elections. We see this as the first salvo in a possible sustained attack on OMIK's ability to continue its elections assistance in Kosovo, and such an assault will require close cooperation with Quint countries in defending ongoing preparations for these critical elections. END COMMENT

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